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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: AMBASSADOR ENGAGES POLITICAL ELITES IN KANO

Classified by Ambassador Howard F. Jeter. Reason: 1.5(b) and (d).

1. (U) Summary: On May 19-20, Ambassador Jeter traveled to the North,s largest city, Kano, for meetings with prominent community leaders and key political players. Four themes dominated the discussions: 1) electoral irregularities; 2) potential for violence after the elections; 3) the independence of election tribunals; and 4) perceptions that the USG is pro-Obasanjo. Most interlocutors disparaged the results of the April 19 Presidential elections and advised that Obasanjo,s failure to respond to Northern complaints could lead to violent reactions after the inauguration. End Summary.

POSSIBLE VIOLENCE IF GRIEVANCES ARE NOT ADDRESSED

2. (C) Ado Bayero, Emir of Kano and among the most influential northern traditional rulers, warned about the possibility of violence if the Government failed to address complaints of electoral malpractices. The Emir said he had met Obasanjo several times to discuss the possibility of violence, each time stressing the need to reconcile with opposition groups. &We want peace and stability in Nigeria. This explains why we urged all aggrieved candidates to utilize the election tribunals.8 On a parallel track, the President should attempt to reach a political reconciliation with the opposition, Bayero stressed.

3. (C) Junaidu Muhammed, a prominent Kano politician, signaled a possible &northern eruption.8 He cautioned that the current silence in the North was ~ an endorsement of the Presidential elections.8 Northerners felt Buhari won the elections. Muhammed cited 1966 as an example, noting that it took the North five months to react to the assassinations of Northern-based leaders resulting in Nigeria,s first military coup. When the reaction finally came, it was massive. The slowness of the reaction does not augur weakness. &While the North reacts slowly, it also tends to over-react8, he said. Muhammed stated that calming the tension depended on how well Obasanjo reached out to his opposition. He predicted, however, that Obasanjo,s ego and vindictiveness would prevent him from making politic concessions.

4. (C) Rabi,u Musa Kwankwaso, outgoing Governor of Kano State and the only incumbent PDP governor to lose, believed that Kano would remain calm since the ANPP won the election. So far, Kwankwaso is right.

PARTIES WERE GUILTY OF ELECTORAL MALPRACTICES

5. (C) Muhammed said all political parties committed fraud in last month,s elections. He claimed that a free election in Kebbi might not have returned the ANPP governor. He posited, however, that the ruling PDP was the most prolific culprit, accusing it of using security agents, pliant electoral officials and party thugs to guarantee victory at all levels. While voter vigilance in urban centers minimized fraud, rural areas were fertile ground for electoral manipulation. Muhammed told the Ambassador that INEC officers and security officials approached parties to offer &their services and cooperation8 with the hope of coaxing the parties into an escalating bidding war for their services. In Katsina, when Governor Yar,adua heard that officials were making overtures to the ANPP, he offered to beat the price, Muhammed asserted.

6. (C) Auwalu Yadudu, Harvard-trained law professor, election

monitor and former legal adviser to former Heads of State Abacha and Abubakar, gave a graphic account of various forms of electoral malpractices, including ballot box stuffing by government officials, voter intimidation, changing of voter tallies, underage and multiple voting, use of money, and lack of fairness by the INEC officials. Yadudu opined that INEC's shoddy preparations provided an open door for electoral fraud. He said that most polling stations used two voters, lists -- the hand-written register and the INEC computer-generated list. He said some electoral officials colluded with politicians to divert election materials. Yadudu cited a particular polling station in Bichi LGA, Kano State, where voters forcibly recovered ballot papers from a voting clerk who claimed that all ballots had been used. Some of the ballot papers were later found in his car and others were traced to the residence of a government official.

17. (C) Ahmed Jalingo, professor of political science and labor activist who monitored elections in Bauchi State, also complained of serious irregularities. Jalingo said a village chief is now hiding at the residence of a senior official in Bauchi for fear of reprisal by his own community. The local chief ordered his men to assault an ANPP agent only to discover that the ANPP agent was the son of his senior traditional ruler! Jalingo said that while the actual ballot count in Gamawa LGA was still being conducted, an INEC radio announcement reportedly gave a final result for that area. All those present at the collation center, including the PDP agents, were stunned by the announcement of something they had yet to complete.

AGGRIEVED PARTIES MIGHT NOT GET JUSTICE AT THE TRIBUNALS

18. (C) Yadudu said election tribunal precedents clearly showed that the judicial process is available to the highest bidder.⁸ However, he supported the idea of going to the tribunals for posterity.⁸ It was necessary to make a historical record, he said. The opposition might win some low-level positions like state and National Assembly seats but key elections like governors and President would not be overturned no matter what degree of evidence was presented, he predicted.

19. (C) Discounting the possibility that the tribunal would be transparent and follow the rule of law, Jalingo recounted a bitter personal experience he had with electoral tribunals, when he ran for governor of Taraba State. Jalingo recalled members of the election tribunal in Taraba asking him to pay a higher bribe than his opponent when he petitioned the results of the 1991 gubernatorial elections, which he narrowly lost to Governor Jolly Nyame.

PERCEPTIONS THAT USG SUPPORTS OBASANJO BECAUSE OF HIS CHRISTIAN BACKGROUND

10. (C) Jalingo echoed a popular perception among Northern Muslims that the USG supported Obasanjo despite his disregard for basic democratic values, like free and fair elections, because the President was Christian. Jalingo speculated that, if Obasanjo were Muslim the US would have criticized him more heavily for bastardizing democratic norms.⁸

11. (C) The Ambassador unequivocally denied the assertion, stating that the United States supported the democratic process and did not play favorites. The election was for Nigerians to decide. It was not a decision for Washington nor was it one Washington sought to make or influence, he stated.

OBASANJO, BUHARI COMPARED

12. (C) Jalingo feared Obasanjo's Yoruba-centric politics and combative style would further divide Nigerians. He did not foresee President Obasanjo and Vice President Atiku meaningfully reaching out to the opposition and to each of the various regions of the country. While praising Buhari for a tough stance against corruption, Jalingo complained that Obasanjo's opposition to corruption was belied by the fact that his immediate family and relatives of his wife were suddenly immersed in and making fortunes from the oil industry.

13. (C) Muhammed, Jalingo and Yadudu also complained that Obasanjo, not Buhari, exploited the religious card during the

Presidential elections. They pointed out that Obasanjo was regularly televised at the Presidential Chapel conducting religious services. Conversely, Muhammed explained that Buhari was the first Nigerian leader to limit public funds for religious trips. In 1984, Buhari reduced the number of government-funded pilgrims to Saudi Arabia from 150,000 to 20,000, a policy that attracted sharp criticism throughout the North. Buhari also attempted to limit the growing influence of the late Sheikh Abubakar Gumi, founder of the vocal and influential Islamic group Izala.

ALLEGED PLANS BY THE REGIME TO ARREST BUHARI

14. (C) Echoing reports from other sources, Muhammed alleged that the regime had issued orders to arrest Buhari before the May 3 State Assembly elections. He explained that the main reason General Ajibade, the recently removed Director of Military Intelligence, was reassigned to Nigerian Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies was because Ajibade warned the regime of dire consequences if Buhari were arrested. Ajibade reportedly told a security meeting, with President Obasanjo and Vice President Atiku present, that reports reaching his office indicated that Buhari carried most of the polling stations where soldiers were voters. Therefore, a regime decision to arrest Buhari could lead to unrest in the military and among the general population.

INCOMING GOVERNOR OF KANO

15. (C) Zainab Kabir, professor of sociology and Muslim female activist, said that the new Kano State Governor, Ibrahim Shekarau, is a veteran technocrat and probably honest; however, most of the ANPP officials around him were as corrupt as other politicians. He might be the only sheep among the wolves, she said. Kabir cited a recent incident where some Kano businessmen and politicians offered new vehicles, expensive clothes and other inducements to the incoming politicians. Shekarau reportedly rejected the offers but his deputy Magaji Abdullahi gathered his share of the loot with unabashed relish.

16. (C) Outgoing Governor Kwankwaso said he feared that the lack of experience on the part of Shekarau could make him vulnerable to manipulation by politicians within and outside Kano. In previous conversations, Kwankwaso had also described Shekarau as a religious hard-liner who would strictly impose the Sharia code in Kano.

COMMENT

17. (C) Many Northerners are upset about the results of the April elections. This is not so much that they really supported Buhari but because they bitterly opposed Obasanjo and what he represented to them. He represented a tectonic shift of power from the Northwest to the Southwest, from the Muslim to the Christian. Northerners are used to being in the driver's seat of national politics; their current tenure in the passenger seat has become very uncomfortable. They cannot help but believe that since Buhari carried the North, he should have won the election. Before this election, a maxim in Nigerian politics was that whoever won the North won the election. That maxim is no longer valid.

18. (C) Because of these political antecedents, the loudest hue and cry against electoral misconduct has emanated from the North. However, the worst electoral injustices were probably committed in the South-South and Southeast, albeit in the gubernatorial and National Assembly races. Most Southerners believe or are willing to accept that Obasanjo won the Presidency. Yet, because many Northerners viscerally oppose Obasanjo's reelection, election-related protests and violence are more likely to occur in parts of the Northwest than any other area of the country (with the Southeast coming in second). This observation begets another. The election intensified ethnic, regional and religious sentiment and has exposed unfortunate bigotries on both sides of Nigeria's North-South divide. For instance, it was disingenuous for the Ambassador's interlocutors in Kano to accuse Obasanjo of playing the religious card while claiming Buhari preferred a secular deck. Buhari and his supporters played religion to the hilt during the election. The claim that Obasanjo has been Yoruba-centric is partially grounded in fact but it is also exaggerated, an end-product of the inflated rhetoric of ethnicity.

19. (C) Essentially, many Northerners are guilty of reverse-image ethnic and religious biases for which they blame Obasanjo. Nevertheless, grievances of electoral shenanigans are warranted to a large extent. The PDP sweep the elections; the opposition in all parts of the country feels cheated. Obasanjo and his PDP could lessen tension if a political settlement could be reached with more of the opposition. This is probably easier in the Southeast and the South-South where the readjustment of some National Assembly seats and some senior level appointments could provide a fix.

However, mollifying the North will be a different ballgame because the North wants what it once had which is something Obasanjo will not give up)-Presidential power and control of Nigeria.

JETER

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